

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUEBEC 00322 091852Z

53

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SUBJ: RENE LEVESQUE OUTLINES PQ AGRICULTURAL POLICY

1. RENE LEVESQUE OUTLINED IN A NOV 8 NEWS CONFERENCE IN RIMOUSKI THE AGRICULTURE POLICIES HIS PARTY WILL FOLLOW IF IT WINS THE ELECTION. HE BEGAN WITH THE PREAMBLE THAT IT WAS NOT ENOUGH TO SPEAK OF QUEBECOIS ATTACHMENT TO THE LAND, ONE MUST LIVE IT. HE SAID HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD MAKE AGRICULTURE A PRIORITY AND WOULD INCREASE THE AGRICULTURE MINISTRY BUDGET IN RELATION TO THE TOTAL PROVINCIAL BUDGET BY REDUCING "WASTE AND NON-ESSENTIAL SPENDING." HE SAID THAT HE DID NOT KNOW, HOWEVER, HOW MUCH HIS POLICIES WOULD COST.

2. THE PQ LEADER PROMISED THAT PQ GOVERNMENT WOULD TAKE "NECESSARY MEASURES" TO RESTORE QUEBEC FARMERS' MILK PRODUCTION QUOTAS TO THEIR 1975 LEVELS. IT WOULD PROMOTE THE SALE OF QUEBEC FARM PRODUCE BY SUCH MEANS AS DAILY DISTRIBUTION OF FREE MILK TO SCHOOL CHILDREN. HE ADDED THAT PQ WOULD INTRODUCE A "SEVERE" TAX ON PROFITS FROM THE SALE OF FARM-LAND FOR PURPOSES OF SPECULATION. LEVESQUE SAID 18 PER CENT OF QUEBEC'S BEST FARMLAND IS NOW "IN THE CLUTCHES OF SPECULATORS."

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PAGE 02 QUEBEC 00322 091852Z

3. LEVESQUE NOTED THAT THE SITUATION OF QUEBEC

DAIRY FARMS WAS ESPECIALLY SERIOUS. HE SAID THAT THOUSANDS OF DAIRY FARMERS ARE IN AN UNTENABLE FINANCIAL SITUATION AND MANY ARE GOING BANKRUPT. HE BLAMED THIS ON A "HARMFUL, POORLY-RUN" FEDERAL AGRICULTURAL POLICY WHICH HE CALLED MOST SAVAGE AND DISCRIMINATORY TOWARD QUEBEC. HE ADDED THAT DAIRY FARMERS HAVE LOST 40 MILLION DOLLARS THIS YEAR BECAUSE OF FEDERAL POLICIES AND THAT GRAIN AND LIVESTOCK FARMERS HAVE ALSO LOST HEAVILY. LEVESQUE NOTED THAT QUEBEC'S SHARE OF TOTAL CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL REVENUE HAD DROPPED FROM 15 PERCENT IN 1970 TO 9.9 PERCENT IN 1975.

4. COMMENT: PQ AGRICULTURAL POLICY WILL BE WELL-RECEIVED BY QUEBEC FARMERS WHO ARE VERY UNHAPPY WITH FEDERAL POLICY. WHEN DRIVING THROUGH THE COUNTRYSIDE, ONE NOTES THAT ALMOST EVERY FARM HAS A LARGE SIGN OR BILLBOARD DENOUNCING FEDERAL POLICIES, ESPECIALLY IN THE DAIRY SECTOR. MANY OF THESE DISCONTENTED FARMERS HAVE RALLIED TO THE PQ, GIVING THAT PARTY A BASE OF SUPPORT IN RURAL AREAS THAT IT HAD PREVIOUSLY LACKED. COMBINED WITH INCREASED PQ ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORTS OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS, THIS SUPPORT MIGHT ALLOW PQ TO CARRY SEVERAL NORTH SHORE RURAL RIDINGS FOR FIRST TIME.

5. AS HE HAS THROUGHOUT THE CAMPAIGN, LEVESQUE APPEARED ALMOST PRIME MINISTERIAL IN STYLE DURING HIS PRESS CONFERENCE. HIS RUMPLED SUIT HAS BEEN REPLACED BY A WELL-TAILORED BUSINESS SUIT. HIS RAMBLING STYLE OF SPEAKING WHICH TRANSCRIBES POORLY ONTO PRINTED PAGE HAS BEEN REPLACED BY WELL-WRITTEN SPEECHES WHICH HE READS CAREFULLY. ONLY THE OMNI-PRESENT CIGARETTE SEEMS TO REMAIN FROM THE PREVIOUS IMAGE. THIS CHANGE IS BOTH A CAMPAIGN TACTIC AND AN INDICATION THAT THE PARTY FEELS IT MAY BE ON THE THRESHOLD OF ASSUMING POWER. LEVESQUE'S ONLY "MISTAKE" IN PRESS CONFERENCE WAS TO ADMIT THAT HE HAD NO IDEA WHAT HIS FARM POLICIES WOULD COST. THIS COULD PLAY INTO THE HANDS OF FINANCE MINISTER RAYMOND GARNEAU WHO IS CAMPAIGNING HARD ON "FALLACIES" OF PQ ECONOMIC PLANNING.
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